



## South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



# VOLUNTEERS RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR SERVICE

The Helpline Center in Rapid City honored 47 individuals, groups and businesses during their 2017 Spirit of Volunteerism Awards luncheon Tuesday in Rapid City.

This year's theme was – Volunteers Sow the Seeds of Service. Volunteers were nominated by Black Hills area nonprofits and individuals in the community. Volunteers and businesses were nominated for their volunteer contributions to the community.

SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman and Field Officer Will Huffmon attended the luncheon in support of Operation Black Hills Cabin's nominee Mrs. Fajfer. Fajfer volunteers at Oper-



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ation Black Hills Cabin for doing fund raising, cleaning the cabin, WEB management, and much more.

Although she was not presented one of the awards, Fajfer will always be a winner in the eyes of SDDVA, Operation Black Hills Cabin and our veterans for her support of our veterans and their families.

## VA PARTNERS WITH DOE ON BIG DATA INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE VETERANS HEALTHCARE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) announced the formation of a new partnership focused on the secure analysis of large digital health and genomic data, or so-called “big data,” from the VA and other federal sources to help advance health care for veterans and others in areas such as suicide prevention, cancer and heart disease, while also driving DOE’s next-generation supercomputing designs.

Known as the VA-DOE Big Data Science Initiative, the partnership will be based within DOE’s National Laboratory system, one of the world’s top resources for supercomputing. The effort will leverage the latest DOE expertise and technologies in big data, artificial intelligence and high-performance computing to identify trends that will support the development of new treatments and preventive strategies.

DOE high-performance computing represents the state of the art in global computer science, involving machines capable of millions of billions of calculations per second. The VA takes privacy seriously and has ensured all reasonable safeguards are in place to protect the records at the DOE National Laboratory.



One part of the new initiative is MVP-CHAMPION— short for the Million Veteran Program (MVP) Computational Health Analytics for Medical Precision to Improve Outcomes Now. MVP, VA’s landmark genomics program, has already enrolled more than 560,000 veteran volunteers who have provided DNA samples; completed surveys about their health, lifestyle and military experiences; and granted secure access to their electronic health records for research purposes. The partnership with DOE will maximize the impact of studies using MVP data.

Along with data from MVP and VA’s electronic health records system, the new VA-DOE program will use health data from the Department of Defense, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Center for Disease Control’s National Death Index.

An initial suite of specific studies that are part of VA-DOE Big Data Science Initiative is already being planned. One aims to build algorithms to generate highly tailored personalized risk scores for suicide. The scores could be used by the VA clinicians and researchers to help predict which patients are at the highest risk, and to evaluate prevention strategies. The researchers will work with the VA’s Office of Suicide Prevention to enhance current algorithms already in use in VA.

Another project focused on prostate cancer will seek new ways to tell which tumors are lethal versus nonlethal cancer and require treatment, and, by contrast, others that are slow growing and unlikely to cause any symptoms. Yet another study will explore what sets of risk factors are the best predictors of certain forms of cardiovascular disease to inform individualized therapy and treatments for patients based on their individual risk factors.

For more information on MVP, informatics and VA research in general, visit [www.research.va.gov](http://www.research.va.gov).

## SDNG PARTICIPATES IN MAJOR CYBER EXERCISE

Nine members of the South Dakota National Guard joined more than 800 other participants at Camp Williams for Exercise Cyber Shield 17, the National Guard's premier cyber defense training exercise, Apr. 23-May 5.

The exercise, which includes members of the National Guard, the Army Reserve, state and federal government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private industry from 44 states, is designed to assess participants' ability to respond to cyber incidents.

By working closely with interagency partners and the private sector, the National Guard seeks to strengthen network cybersecurity and the capability to support local responses to cyber incidents. Cyber Shield 17 is part of the National Guard's ongoing effort to improve its ability to respond to real-world cyber incidents.

The first phase of the exercise provides participants the opportunity to hone their skills through academic instruction covering everything from the legal aspects of cyber operations to the nature of cyber threats to hands-on technical training. Equally important, the soldiers and airmen are learning their roles as part of the larger cyberspace defense community.

During the second phase of Cyber Shield 17, participants form cyber protection teams and face off against trained antagonists, who simulate online adversaries. The teams try to defend their networks and mitigate the effects of attacks in a freewheeling clash of cyberspace acumen.

The National Guard's dual state-federal status makes it uniquely positioned to help civilian agencies and critical nongovernmental entities if an incident occurs. Because of their status as a state military force when not under federal mobilization orders, Guard units are available to respond to state-level emergencies at their governor's discretion.

"As a governor would call up the National Guard for a state disaster, such as a hurricane - it's no different for a cyber event," said Lt. Col. Henry Capello, the exercise commander.

Moreover, the National Guard's long-standing connections with state and local governments and private industry, combined with its familiarity with the cyberspace environment in which these organizations operate, make it an ideal partnership.

"Being a citizen-soldier, and being able to work in the communities in which I live, is a little bit different," Capello said. "It means a lot more to me, and I'm able to help them because I understand their problems better."





## RED SHIRT FRIDAY EVENT TO RECOGNIZE DEPLOYED SERVICE MEMBERS

South Dakota employers, schools and citizens are encouraged to show their support for all service members deployed overseas by participating in R.E.D. (Remember Everyone Deployed) Shirt Friday.

The South Dakota National Guard, Ellsworth Air Force Base and the S.D. Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve invites the public to participate by wearing a red shirt on all Fridays while South Dakota citizens are deployed to remember and honor all members of the military for their service to the state and nation.

A May 12 R.E.D. event is being held to highlight members of the 153rd Engineer Battalion currently deployed to Kuwait. Throughout the past year, the SDNG has been highlighting deployed units and individual members during R.E.D Friday events.

"Wearing red shirts on Fridays sends a strong and unified message to our service members and families that they are not forgotten and we appreciate their sacrifice to our country," said Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the SDNG. "Wearing a red shirt is a simple gesture, but the meaning behind it is significant."

Gov. Dennis Daugaard has demonstrated his support by signing a proclamation announcing all Fridays that South Dakota citizens are deployed in harm's way to be R.E.D. Shirt Friday in South Dakota.

South Dakota employers, schools and citizens are encouraged to provide additional support by:

- \* Signing a Statement of Support through the ESGR to show your support (for more information about this please contact MAJ Lona Christensen, SD ESGR Program Director, at 605-737-6540.
- \* Sending cards/letters to the unit or someone in the unit.
- \* Creating a banner or video from your organization to send to the unit.
- \* Checking in with the family of a deployed service member.
- \* Providing a meal for a family of a deployed service member.
- \* Using the hashtag #RememberEveryoneDeployed when posting your pictures to social media sites.
- \* Sending a picture of your company to [redshirtfriday.southdakota@gmail.com](mailto:redshirtfriday.southdakota@gmail.com) and we may share your picture through our social media sites.
- \* Supporting the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veteran's Home in Hot Springs or a veteran service organization in your community.

Currently, there are about 240 Ellsworth Air Force Base Airmen and nearly 190 South Dakota Army and Air National Guard members deployed overseas.



## DAV CONVENTION

SDDVA Field Officers Kevin Bowen and Kevin Swanson attended the DAV state convention in Pierre last weekend.



Field Officer Bowen participated in the roundtable program, along with VA Directors and congressional staff members.

Field Officers Bowen and Swanson also manned a booth at the meeting and visited with DAV members about the benefits and services.



## LEO THORSNESS, MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT, DIES AT AGE 85

Col. Leo K. Thorsness, one of the most highly decorated American airmen of the Vietnam War and a belated recipient of the Medal of Honor for his heroism on a mission that took place 11 days before he was shot down and taken prisoner, died Tuesday in Jacksonville, Fla. Colonel Thorsness, who had been brutalized during his six years of captivity at the notorious North Vietnamese prison known as the Hanoi Hilton, where he was a cellmate of [John McCain](#)'s, was 85.

Major Thorsness was in captivity when he learned that he had been recommended for the Medal of Honor, for aiding fellow airmen while in great peril on that 88th mission. Word of it came from the officer who had written the recommendation; he had later been shot down and taken to the Hanoi Hilton as well.

But no announcement was made by American military officials until Major Thorsness's return home in March 1973 out of fear that his captors would retaliate with even greater brutality.

He received the medal from President Richard M. Nixon in a White House ceremony on Oct. 15, 1973, for "extraordinary heroism, self-sacrifice and personal bravery." He was also awarded two Silver Stars and five Distinguished Flying Crosses for his exploits in the war.

His obituary can be found at: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/herald/obituary.aspx?n=leo-thorsness&pid=185283860>.

His Medal of Honor story can be found at:  
<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/herald/obituary.aspx?n=leo-thorsness&pid=185283860>.  
<http://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Medal%20of%20Honor/Thorsness.pdf>.



# Upcoming Events

May 5-6 Veterans Day and Howard Wood Relays

May 6—Military Order of the Purple Heart Convention—Rapid City Howard Johnson—10:00 am (MT)

May 12—Improving Combat Veterans Care—Sioux Falls University Center

Jun 10—SD Marine Corps League Annual Meeting—Pierre Post 8 (520 W. Pierre Street) - 10:00 am (CT)

Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown—Ramkota

Jun 22-25—State VFW Convention—Pierre—Ramkota

Aug 14-17—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre—Ramkota

Here's  
What's  
Happening!

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